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Naming Names, 1981 The Terror Hearings

By Cockburn & Ridgeway

WASHINGTON, D.C.—At the end of last week the newly formed Senate subcommittee on security and terrorism made its first lunge for the spotlight by taking testimony from a number of journalists and former CIA director William Colby on the topic of Soviet sponsorship of international terrorism.

The hearing had been awaited with some trepidation on the left and among liberals in general. There were reports that Joel Lisker, counsel to the Republican-controlled subcommittee, had a list of U.S. subversive organizations, and rumors that the subcommittee's chairman, Alabama

Senator Jeremiah Denton, wanted to subpoena the records of groups participating in the upcoming May 3 demonstration in Washington, D.C., against U.S. intervention in El Salvador.

And of course the basic fear has been that the subcommittee heralds a return to the witch-hunting days of Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee.

By the time the subcommittee recessed at the end of Friday afternoon, the packed hearing room in the Dirksen building had indeed heard some vintage witch-hunting testimony, notably from former *Newsweek* correspondent Arnaud de Borchgrave, who traced the Soviet Union's "covert role" straight to the antinuclear lobby in the United States through the Mobilization for Survival—an allegation hotly contested by the Mobilization.

Denton and the Sacred Heart

But it became apparent almost from the start of the session at 9 a.m. that the course of the committee's inquiries were and will be subject to the sometimes surprising personal preoccupations of Senator Denton. Of the two Democrats on the subcommittee, Senator Joe Biden stayed away, and Senator Patrick Leahy attended only until lunch. Of the other Republicans Senator John East was detained at his own abortion hearings on the troubling question of when human life begins, and Senators Orrin Hatch and Strom Thurmond (who chairs the full Judiciary Committee) did not attend.

The day therefore belonged to Denton and to his long, rambling and indeed startling monologues, most frequently on the subject of the Vietnam war. Denton was a POW in North Vietnam for nearly eight years and suffered great physical hardships. For him the mystery is why the U.S. did not stick to its guns and win the war. He is a keen supporter of Nixon, who returned the compliment by helping to finance Denton's campaign last year. Denton thinks Nixon was right to bomb Hanoi and that through this bombing—had the U.S. only realized it—the war was in fact won.

Denton's position on Vietnam stems in turn from a Catholic faith that is powerful in the extreme, and perhaps best illustrated by a religious experience he related last year to the magazine *New Wine*: "My cellmate and I [in the POW camp] were in irons. It wasn't a terribly painful thing, but because I was in a set that was difficult to open, I had been in one position for 26 days or so without having moved my legs at all. Although I wasn't in deep pain, it was a very depressing time. Shouts and screams could be heard throughout the day, and as a result, I was beginning to suffer psychologically. Silently I began to wonder, 'Lord, will we ever get out of here?'"

"At 1:30 one afternoon I was praying very hard, trying to resist some discouraging thoughts. I didn't want to sink into despair or lose my sense of humor, and I especially did not want to lose my determination. I was seeking the Lord when suddenly a strong, clear voice said to me, 'Say: "Sacred Heart of Jesus, I give myself to thee."'" The words were said in such an assuring way that I knew it was an exhorta-